



MINISTERS OF THE KINGDOM

BRIAN R. WI
DRAWING



This book is dedicated to Martha,
the last passenger pigeon on Earth, who died on
September 1, 1914, at the Cincinnati Zoo.

MINISTERS OF THE KINGDOM

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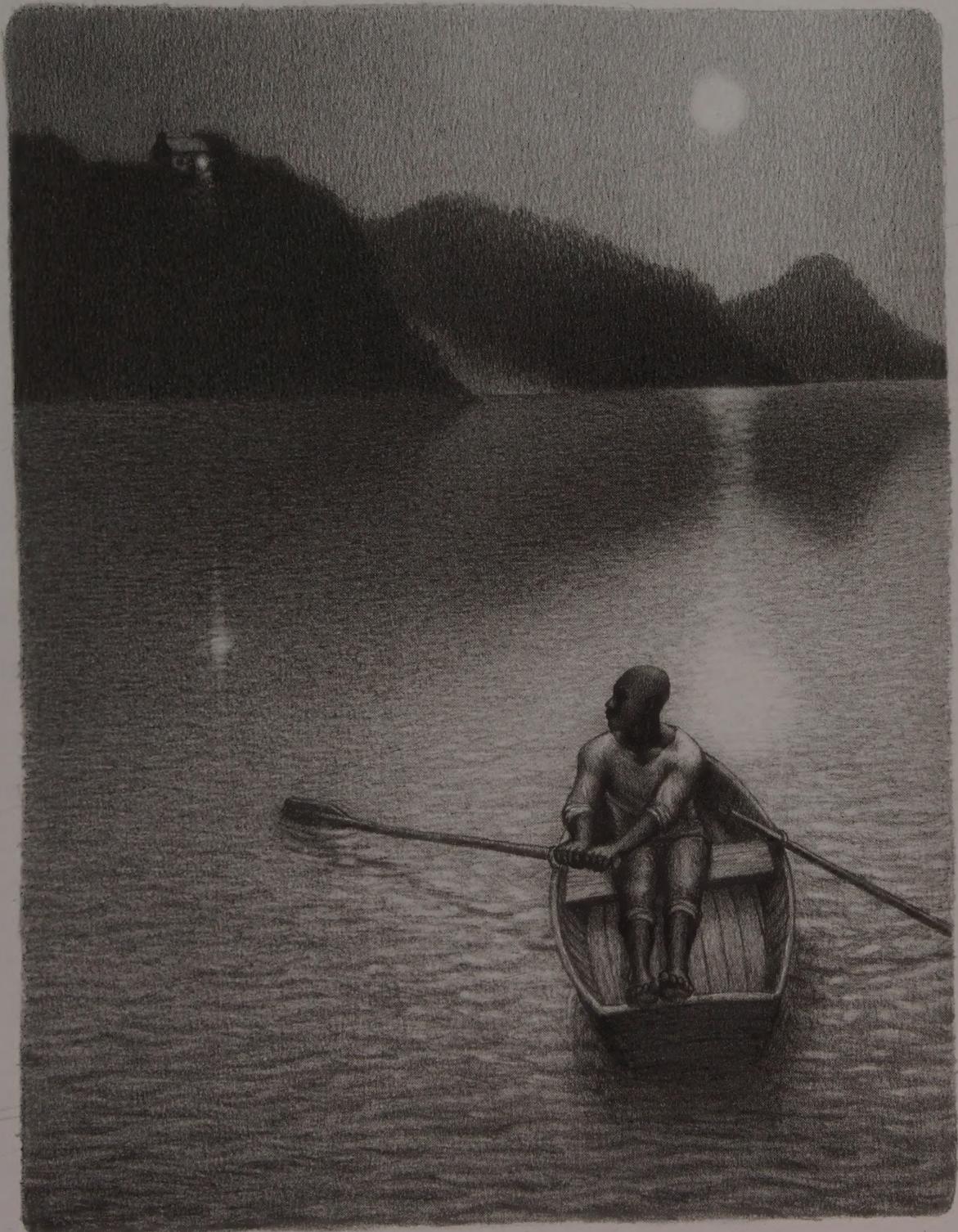
I COULD SWEAR I SAW A LIGHT

EXCERPTS FROM MY FIRST SOLO SHOW

I Could Swear I Saw A Light was the name of my 2008 solo exhibition at the Ohio Art League gallery in the Short North arts district in Columbus. I was exploring how to use surreal compositions to establish a mood or tell a story. This show was the first time since college that I felt like I was finding my voice as a professional artist. I was and continue to be very proud of several of these pieces.

In these drawings, I am exploring the graphite medium as a way to produce a finished piece, and not just a sketch as a step towards a more formal, painted work. I love the textures that pencil creates on paper. I also amuse myself by thinking about how graphite, as pure carbon, is chemically identical to diamond. (The difference is structural; carbon molecules in diamonds are arranged in a hexagonal lattice bonded strongly together on all sides, whereas the molecules in graphite are arranged in flat sheets, stacked one on top of the other, that are loosely bonded and slide apart easily. That's why graphite lends itself so well to writing and drawing. I think modern pencil leads are a mixture of graphite and clay, but let's continue to indulge my fantasy that I'm drawing with diamonds, okay?)

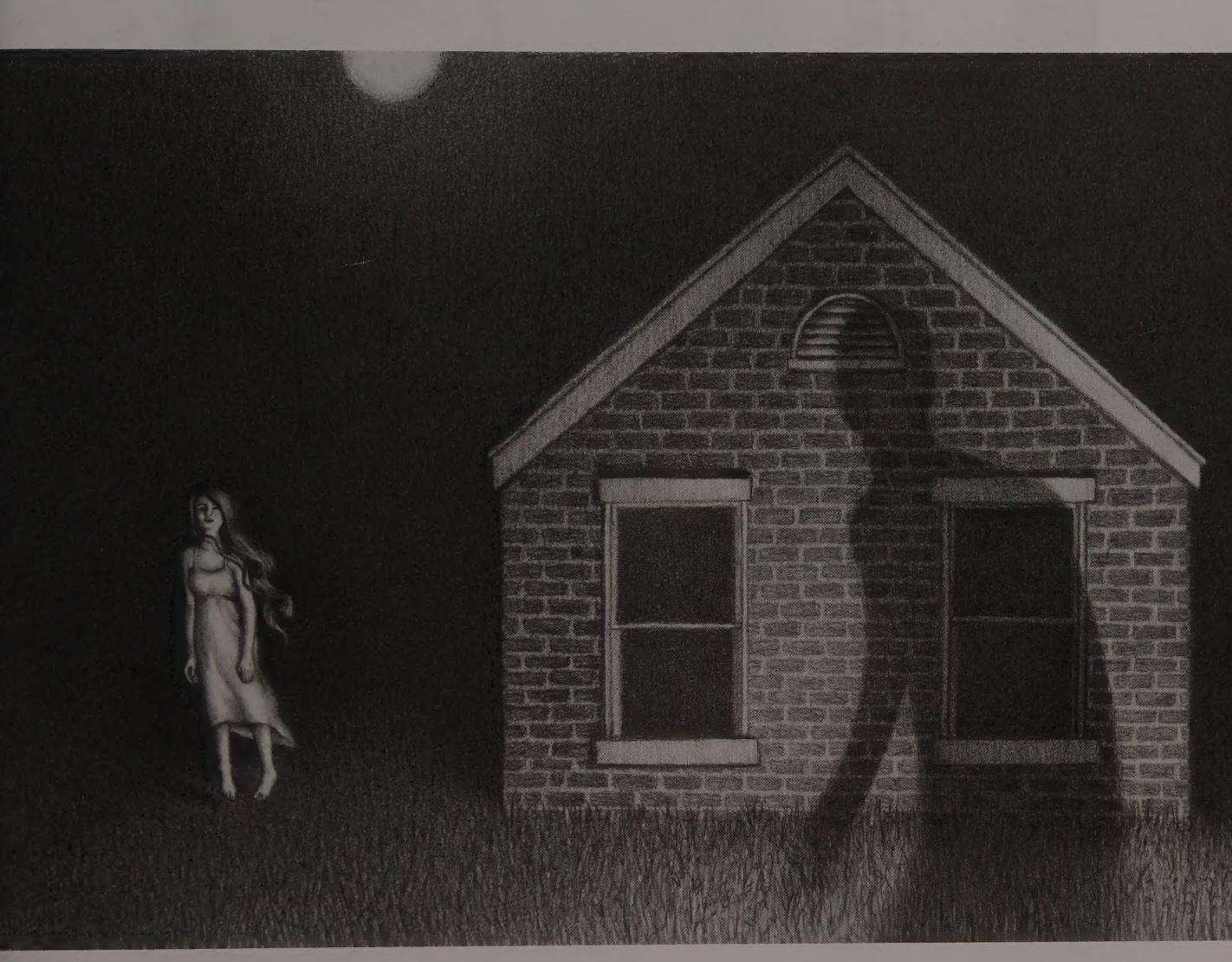
Most of the drawings for the show had a fictional or autobiographical narrative, but one drawing, *I Could Swear I Saw A Light*, was inspired by historical events. The drawing shows a man rowing across a river at night, using as a guide a single light in the window of a house on the far bank. The house belongs to John Rankin, a Presbyterian minister and pre-Civil War abolitionist. Rankin lived on the northern side of the Ohio River, which was the boundary between the Southern slave states and the free states in the North. His light guided escaping slaves across the river on their perilous journey northward via the Underground Railroad through Ohio, to Canada and ultimately freedom. 



I COULD SWEAR I SAW A LIGHT



ALAS! YOU ARE THE APPLE OF MY EYE



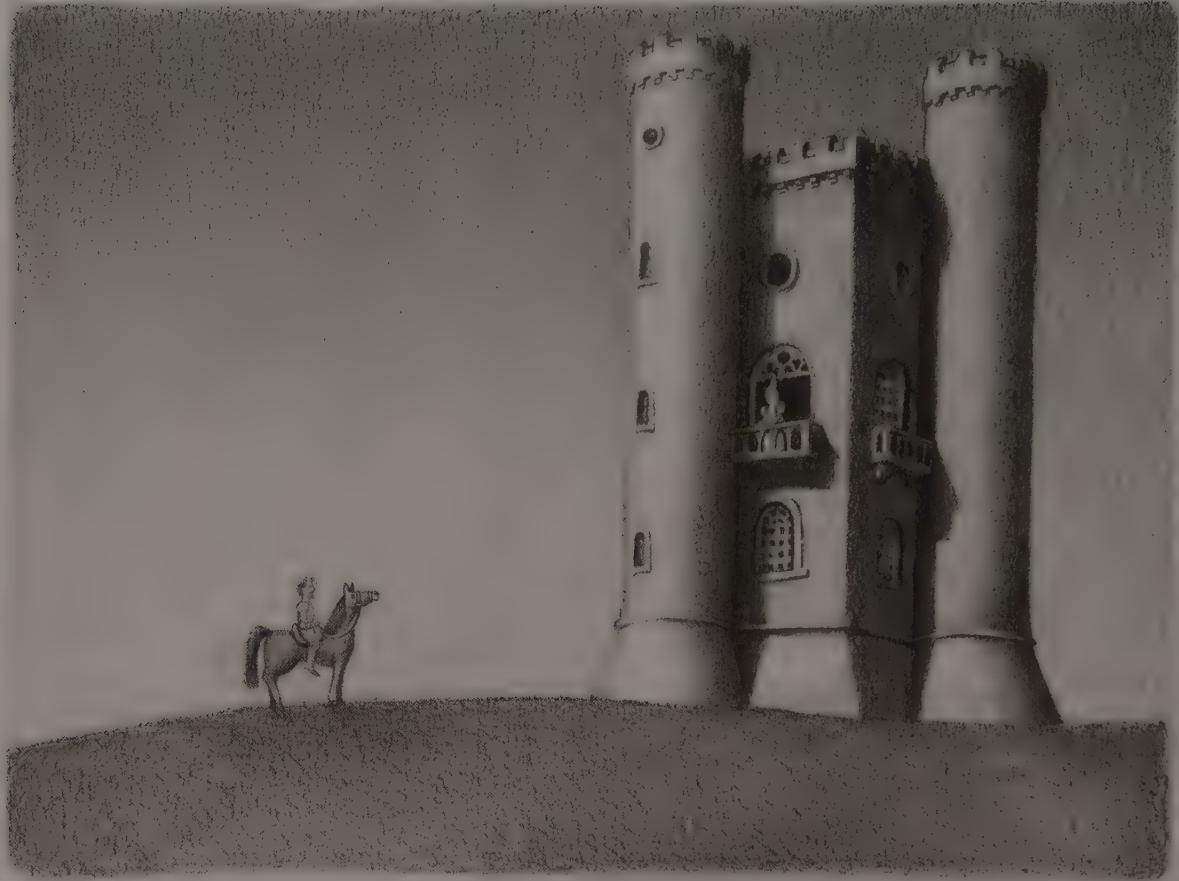
THE SOMNAMBULIST



THE STAIRCASE

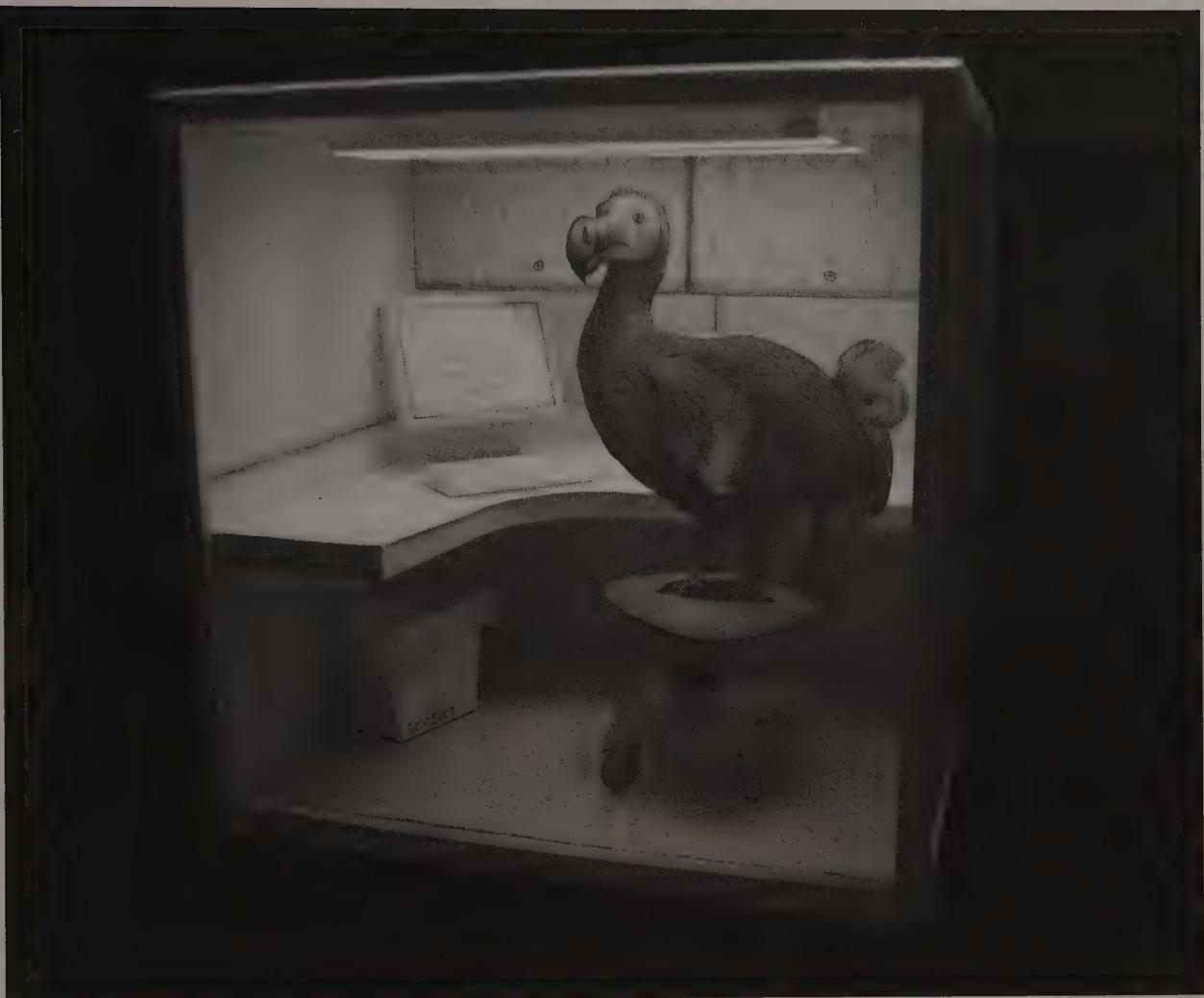


DOKTOR SCHNABEL VON NEW ALBANY



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YOU A BITCH



THE DODO

A 6" x 6" x 6" shadowbox made of foam core, vellum and graphite on cut Bristol board.



THE *FOWL FRATERNITY*

The Fowl Fraternity was my first experience with a concept that led to a series of drawings instead of a single composition. I started by making a list of all of the names of birds that could also be used to describe people. It didn't escape my notice that most of these names can be insulting when applied to people (and birds too, I would like to point out): dodo, loon, cuckoo, booby, chick. This observation inspired the characterization that is seen in the drawings.

"Dodo" has come to mean a dim-witted individual, inspired by the birds' fearless behavior when approached by Dutch sailors when they landed on Mauritius Island in the Indian Ocean, the sole habitat of the dodo, in 1598. It was the birds' fearlessness (as well as their flightless nature) that made them easy to capture; less than one hundred years after the birds were first discovered, they went extinct. I always thought it was unfair that the dodo was blamed for its own extinction, so for my Dodo drawing, I chose to portray him as a professor. Academics are popularly depicted as being intelligent but also absent-minded — liable to step in front of a bus or into an open elevator shaft because their nose is in a book — so I like thinking of my Dodo as being similarly personified. ↗



THE DODO



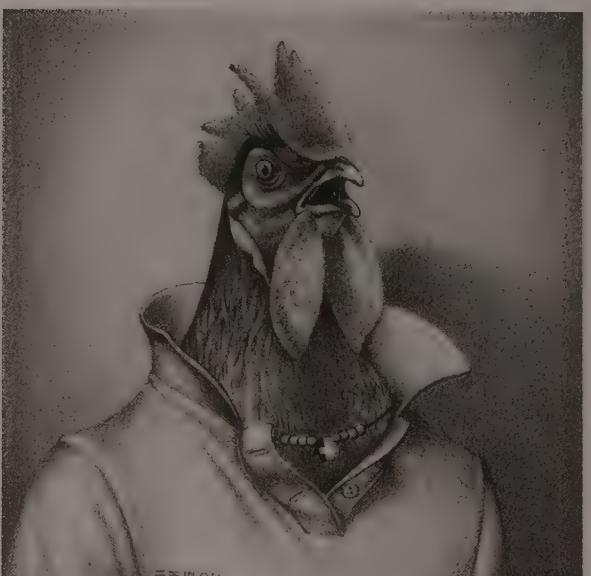
THE BOOBY



THE CUCKOO



THE CARDINAL



THE COCK



THE CHICK



THE DRAKE



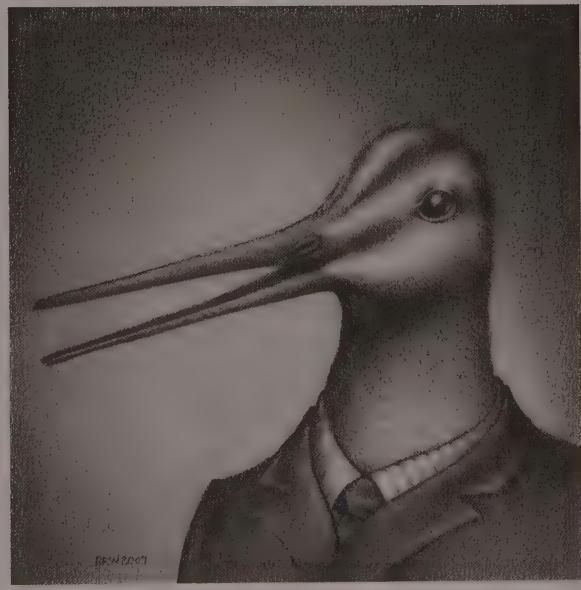
THE HAWK



THE LOON



THE OWL



THE SNIPE

EXTINCT BIRDS

I created the *Extinct Birds* series in 2012 for a group show I organized with two of my artist friends, Eric Albrecht and Brooke Wenstrup Albrecht. Called “From a Different Flock,” the show focused on bird-related artwork, which is a common theme in all of our work. For my part of the exhibition, I chose to depict birds wearing clothes that were fashionable during the year that they went extinct. I completed seven drawings for the show and added an eighth drawing to the series — *Choiseul Pigeon, c. 1929* — a year later.

The drawings in this series show two timelines colliding: the evolutionary end-of-the-line for each of these bird species, and human history through the lens of fashion design between 1844 and 1989. When I conceived this series, I envisioned a whimsical little collection of surreal portraits. But as I was drawing them, I started thinking of these birds as individuals with personalities: the aristocratic auk; the pleasantly goofy parakeet; the chic and stylish grebe, and so on. I look at them now and see them as memorials of what has been lost to the relentless advance of human progress.

The *Extinct Birds* series led to many professional opportunities for me. They have been published in magazines and literary journals in the U.K., Australia, Spain and Austria, and have been featured on several websites, including ARTnews.com and the Audubon Society blog. This series also led to a remarkable collaboration between myself and Mikael Vogel, a poet who lives and works in Berlin, Germany. His poems inspired by these drawings were published in *Trièdere*, a German-language literary journal. He also printed our poem/drawing pairings on postcards and distributed them in cafés around Berlin. Mikael and I continue to collaborate and have exciting new projects in the works for next year. 



LAUGHING OWL, 1914





CAROLINA PARAKEET, 1918



CHOISEUL PIGEON, c. 1929



HAWAII 'O'O, 1934



IMPERIAL WOODPECKER, c. 1956



MOLOKAI CREEPER, c. 1963



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ATITLÁN GREBE, 1989

RIGHT: HENRY MORTON STANLEY, 1876

Henry Morton Stanley explored the Congo.

EXPLORERS

After my art show featuring the *Extinct Birds* series, I was invited to display new artwork at the Explorers Club restaurant in Columbus, Ohio. Going with the "explorers" theme of the restaurant, I decided to do a series of drawings showing famous explorers depicted as endangered animals from the country or region they are known for exploring. Like the *Extinct Birds*, the *Explorers* drawings reflect on how humans have interfered with the natural world.

I have a soft spot for gorillas, so I think my favorite drawing in this series is *Henry Morton Stanley, 1876*. I was raised by a gorilla, in fact. Her name was Gonga. She was one of those stuffed-animal gorillas with the plastic face, hands and feet, and whose thumbs fit into her mouth. My aunt gave her to me when I was born, and I carried her everywhere until I started kindergarten. My mom and I are pretty sure Gonga became my surrogate mother after my little sister came along. Some kids have a security blanket. I had a security gorilla, I guess. ☺



三省川



LEIF ERICSON, c. 1000

Leif Ericson was the first European to reach North America.



VASCO DA GAMA, 1498

Vasco da Gama was the first European to reach India by sea.

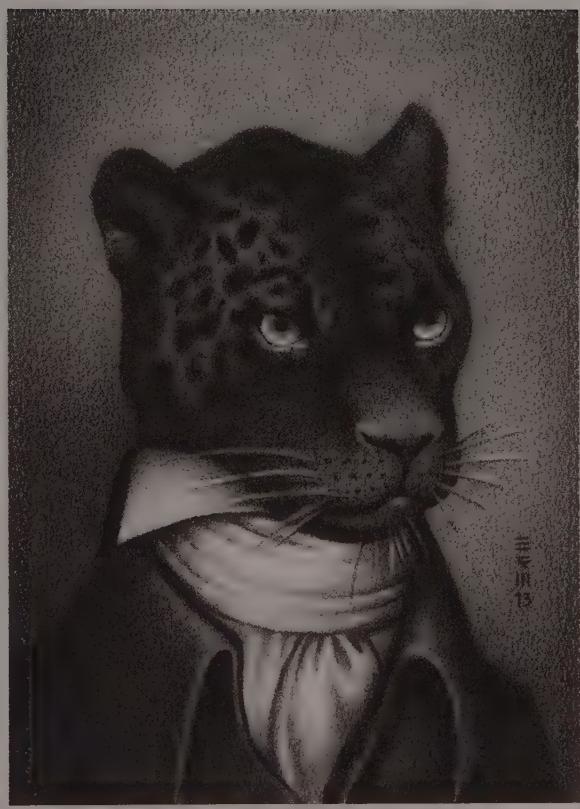


WILLEM JANSZOON, c. 1606

Willem Janszoon was the first European to reach Australia.



MERIWETHER LEWIS



WILLIAM CLARK

LEWIS AND CLARK, 1804

Lewis and Clark explored the North American interior.



PENGUIN / AUTOGYRO

FLIGHTLESS BIRDS

This little drawing duo shows two flightless birds, a penguin and a kiwi, given the gift of man-made flight. I had originally conceived of a larger series of a half-dozen or so drawings, showing flightless birds using technology to finally be able to fly; however, after I finished these two, I moved on to other ideas. I still like this idea, so I may find my way back to this series at some point in the future.



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KIWI/PARACHUTE

FEARSOME CRITTERS

My *Fearsome Critters* drawings are inspired by tales of bizarre and fantastical mythical creatures that lumberjacks claimed to encounter in the vast North American wilderness. The stories were often used to explain mysterious sounds, unexplained disappearances, or to frighten the rookies while they sat around the campfire or lodge stove at night.

There are dozens of fearsome critters, so far I've illustrated three. (Will I draw more critters in the future? Maybe! We'll see...) The first critter, the *Hidebehind*, is one of the more terrifying of the bunch. It likes to hide behind trees (hence his name) to attack and kill unsuspecting lumberjacks who pass by, usually by disemboweling them with its razor-sharp claws. The *Hidebehind* mirrors tales of the "wood devil" that is said to inhabit the forests of New England. Wood devils are tall and skinny, and also hide behind trees. I don't think I've read any tales of a wood devil killing anybody, though; they seem to prefer to remain unseen, going as far as shuffling around the circumference of the tree they're hiding behind as someone walks past, so that the tree is always between themselves and the unsuspecting human.

Teakettlers are much less fearsome critters than *Hidebehinds*. *Teakettlers* are dog-like creatures with cat-like tails. They can only walk backwards and, for some reason, whistle like tea kettles. It remains mysterious why lumberjacks would have needed to explain disembodied whistling noises in the middle of the woods.

Perhaps the weirdest fearsome critter is the *Luferlang*. *Luferlangs* resemble donkeys, except they have an extra joint in each leg and their tail grows out of the center of their back. Their bite is fatal, although the animal bites on only one day each year: July 12. I decided to depict my *Luferlang* as a happy fellow, but also someone you'd prefer to leave alone for your own sake. ↗



THE HIDEBEHIND



THE TEAKETTLERS



WHALEPLANES

I'm particularly fond of my *Whaleplanes*. Does anyone remember "Whales, Dolphins and Us," a nature special from 1990, starring Elle Macpherson swimming with dolphins? I had it on VHS when I was a kid. I was mesmerized by the amazing underwater video footage showing how gracefully whales move through the water. These drawings are my imaginings of how whales would move through the air just as gracefully: flying in formation like warplanes or cruising along steadily at altitude like a giant zeppelin.

It wasn't until after I had completed *Blackfish Squadron* that a friend of mine said I should've depicted them bombing SeaWorld (maybe an idea for a future drawing). That idea also touches on something I was thinking about when I was making these drawings: if whales had the ability to fly and could maneuver as swiftly as warplanes, they would be able to evade capture from humans and finally forever be safe from harm. 



USS MINKE OVER NEW YORK CITY, 1933



STENELLA CORSAIR



BLACKFISH SQUADRON

THE GILDED AGE

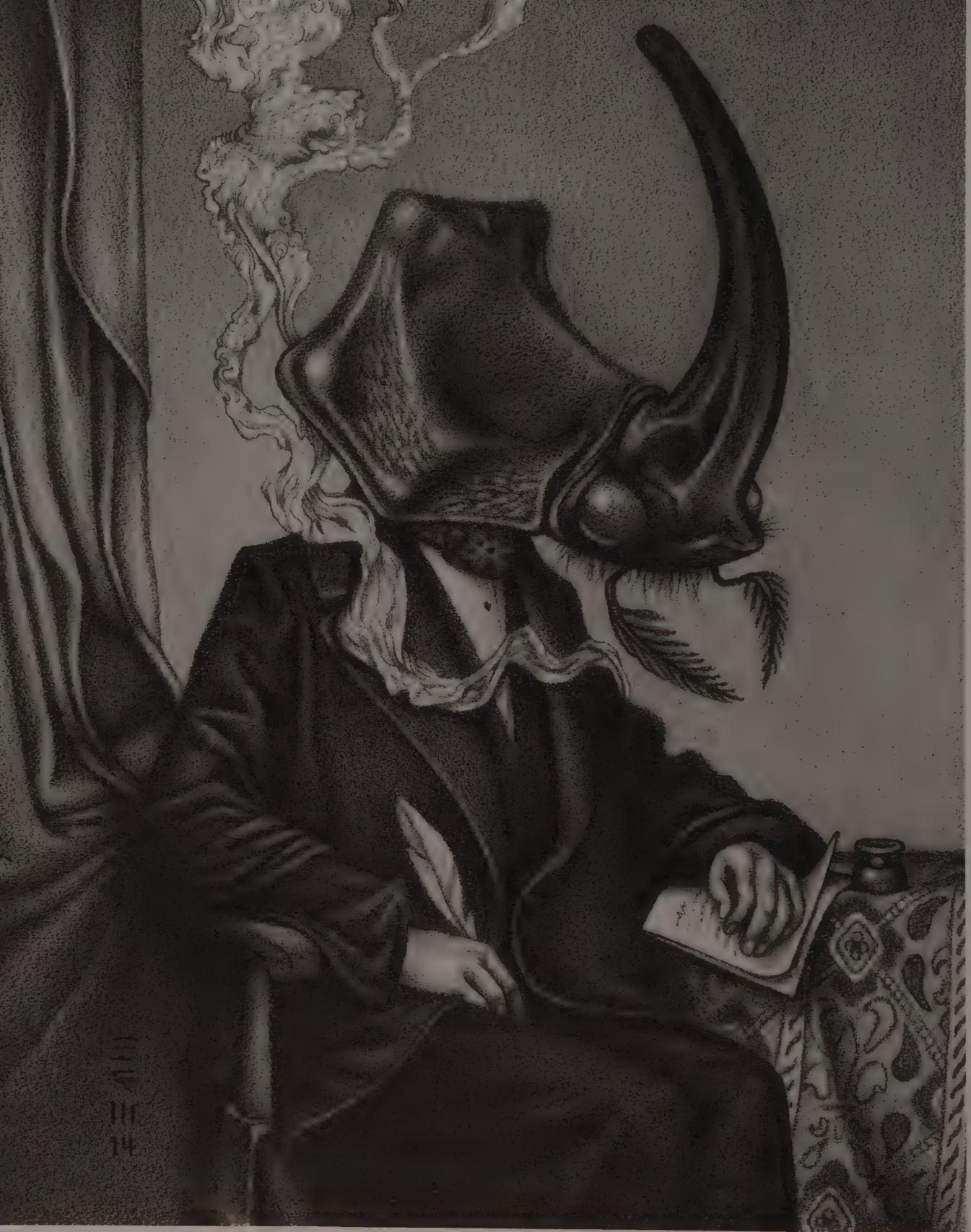
The Gilded Age series started with me wandering around on Wikipedia. I was looking at 19th-century photographs, marveling at the amazing sharpness — nary a pixel to be seen! — as well as the beautiful velvety texture of the old photographic process, but also noticing how stuffy and formal the subjects look. Every aspect of the composition is carefully arranged, from small props like fans and inkwells, to the ubiquitous, elegantly-draped curtain in the corner of the frame. The men in those old photos appear relaxed and self-assured, but the women are so severely trussed up in their corsets that they look like they can barely breathe.

After browsing through these photos for an hour or so, their artifice started to become the predominant element speaking to me. The subjects of these photos, dressed in their finest and surrounded by their expensive baubles, were, after all, still just animals. All the gilded, superficial trappings of human civilization might temporarily obscure, but can't deny, that basic truth.

I selected a dozen or so photographs and unmasked the human subjects to reveal the animals within. A photo of a young one-legged boy, vulnerable but proud, became *Little Phillip*. Franz Kafka's most famous story takes a literal turn in *The Metamorphosis*. Magpies and rabbits, associated with sorrow and fear, respectively, show up in *The Magpie's Widow*, *The Hollenberg Poltergeist* and *The Haunted Gramophone*. For other drawings, I was responding to the repressive social mores of the time, so a group portrait of Victorian-era princesses, whose sole duty in life was to produce offspring, became *Girls with R.S.V.P. Eyes* (I got the title from a 1914 newspaper headline that read, "Girls with R.S.V.P. Eyes Are to Blame for Most of the Flirting These Days").

Sometimes I describe these drawings as "Aesop's fables for the post-industrial era." In our ancestors' folklore, animal characters embodied discrete aspects of our imperfect selves: doubt, evil, empathy, arrogance, wisdom, grace. We told stories about animals to remind ourselves what it means to be human. Today it feels like we are further isolated from nature than ever before, so it might be good from time to time to remember who we are and where we came from. ↗





THE METAMORPHOSIS



LITTLE PHILLIP



HEATHCLIFF



BROOKES OF HAMMOCKSHIRE



THE HOLLENBURG POLTERGEIST



THE HAUNTED GRAMOPHONE



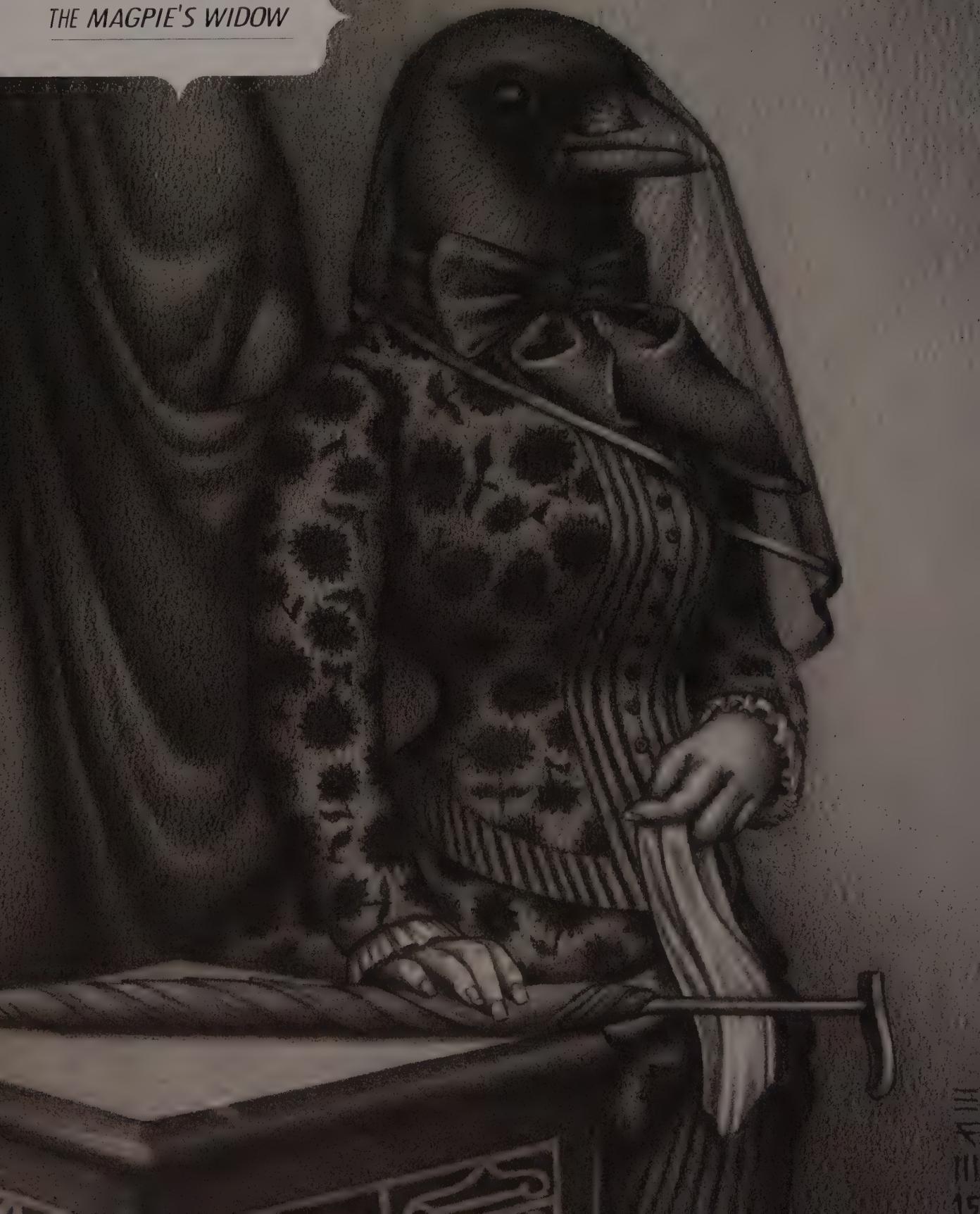
BEATRIX



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FINNIGAN

THE MAGPIE'S WIDOW





GIRLS WITH R.S.V.P. EYES

OTHER STORIES

This chapter is all about my drawings that aren't part of a series. *Femmes Fatales*, on the right, is a group portrait of lethal female animals. Other drawings, like *Finch and Crane* and *Love Birds*, were wedding gifts, and *Lady Gwen of Herefordshire* was a Christmas gift for a friend who owns a small herd of Hereford cattle.

Some of these drawings were created for specific shows. *La Schtroumpfette* and *Toucan Sam at Tikal*, 1925 were for a Saturday-morning-cartoon-and-breakfast-cereal-themed art show. I created *Bigfoot and Little Lillian* for a show called "Monsters in America." The artists participating in the show got to pick which creature from American folklore they wanted to illustrate, so, naturally, I chose my buddy Sasquatch. He's posing with Lillian Smith, a sharpshooter and rival of Annie Oakley who traveled with Oakley in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. The "Monsters in America" show was exhibited at One Mile Gallery in Kingston, New York, as well as at the International Cryptozoology Museum in Portland, Maine.

Behind Black Bird Masks was inspired by a poem written by my friend and frequent collaborator, German poet Mikael Vogel. (*Behind Black Bird Masks* is the English translation of the poem's title: "Hinter Schwartzen Vogelmasken.") The poem is about the po'ouli, a little bird once native to Hawaii that went extinct in 2004. Mikael's work is infinitely inspirational. Not only has his poetry taught me about extinct and endangered animals that I've never heard of before, but his poems are full of beautiful, hauntingly evocative imagery and emotional resonance. ↗





FINCH AND CRANE



LOVE BIRDS



LA SCHTROUMPFETTE



TOUCAN SAM AT TIKAL, 1925



GRUSS VOM KRAMPUS



DRACULA



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BIGFOOT AND LITTLE LILLIAN



FIRST CLASSQUATCH



BEHIND BLACK BIRD MASKS

Inspired by the poem "Hinter Schwartzen Vogelmasken" by Mikael Vogel.



LADY GWEN OF HEREFORDSHIRE

FORWARD TO THE PAST

I'm excited about my two most recent series! Once again, I'm looking back into history for inspiration. I have only just started, but like my other drawing projects, I have already spent many hours planning them in my head, which for me is the fun part. The actual art-making part of the creative process can sometimes be tedious and riddled with self-doubt, but always an exercise in perseverance.

I've tentatively titled the first series *Daguerreosaurs*, illustrations inspired by daguerreotype photos, showing an alternate history where famous 19th-century Americans had dinosaurs as pets. *Annie Oakley and Stegosaurus* is the first finished example, but I have a list in which I've paired about a half-dozen historic Americans with what I think would be their pet dinosaur of choice.

The second series is called *The Dead Monarch Masquerade*, kings and queens of the past whose monarchies were rendered extinct by assassination or violent social upheaval are shown dressed as extinct animals, as if they're attending a costume party in Heaven. The first example of this series depicts Nicholas II, the last czar of Russia, dressed as a thylacine. The second drawing in this series, which is still in progress, shows Marie Antoinette's towering grey pouf styled into the likeness of the recently-extinct western black rhino. Notably, both the thylacine and the western black rhino were still extant when these two royals were alive; the last thylacine died in captivity in 1936, and the western black rhino was added to the list of extinct animals in 2011. So, unlike the *Extinct Birds* series, there is no correlation between the extinction dates of the animals and people depicted. I simply picked animal/human combinations that I thought looked good together.

So tag along with me while I continue these projects, and more! It's really only worth it if I have you all to keep me company. ↗





NICHOLAS II OF RUSSIA / THYLACINE



ABE LINCOLN AND DEINONYCHUS,
IN PROGRESS



FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND
STYRACOSAURUS, IN PROGRESS



MARIE ANTOINETTE AND WESTERN
BLACK RHINO, IN PROGRESS



TO BE
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91416970R00040

Made in the USA
Columbia, SC
16 March 2018



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ISBN 9781507770986

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